

Cabinet – Meeting held on Monday, 18th July, 2016.

Present:- Councillors Munawar (Chair), Hussain (Vice-Chair), Ajaib, Bal, Matloob, Sharif and Sohal

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillors Anderson, Swindlehurst, Bains, Brooker, Carter, Chahal, Davis, Nazir, Parmar and Sadiq

Apologies for Absence:- None

PART 1

18. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Bal declared a personal interest in that his daughter worked for Slough Borough Council.

19. Minutes of the Meeting held on 27th June 2016

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 27th June 2016 be approved as a correct record.

20. Leisure Capital Programme – The refurbishment of Slough Ice Arena and the provision of a temporary ice facility

A report was considered that set out the options for the Cabinet to consider in relation to the provision of a temporary ice facility during the period of closure for refurbishment of Slough Ice Arena. The matter had been discussed by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 14th July and had recommended as follows:

“Cabinet be recommended to explore the procurement of a full sized temporary Ice Rink to meet the needs of all users, for the duration of the refurbishment of the current Ice Rink.”

The background and options considered since the original decision not to provide a temporary facility during the nine-month period of closure were reviewed. The estimated revenue cost of a full size facility was between £632,000 up to a worst case scenario of £1,200,000 primarily for utility and enabling works, and there was currently no provision for this cost so any decision to provide such a facility would result in either additional in year savings or calling on General Fund reserves. It was confirmed that there was some headroom in the available reserves, but the costs could not be capitalised. Commissioners recognised the concerns that had been raised by the community and ice users about the period of closure, which is why they had asked the Overview & Scrutiny Committee to consider the options and make a recommendation on the way forward.

A number of questions were asked about the availability of such a temporary facility; the location and associated planning issues; and the financial risk in view of the revenue budget pressures facing the Council. Officers confirmed that they had made preliminary inquiries into the availability of a full size temporary rink and it was believed such a facility could be sourced. The likely location was close to the existing Ice Arena and further work could be done to try to reduce the estimated costs if the Cabinet agreed in principle to explore this option. Speaking under Rule 30, Councillors Anderson, Swindlehurst and Carter raised a number of issues including whether a temporary facility would delay the refurbishment timetable; the findings of the Equalities Impact Assessment; the potential to reduce the cost by implementing a travel plan for Council staff currently using the Montem car park; and the wider costs of not providing a temporary facility in terms of physical inactivity and health. The questions were answered and comments noted. It was confirmed the refurbishment was still scheduled to begin in November 2016. The Leader confirmed all of these issues would be taken into account in reaching a final decision that was in the best interests of the whole community. The Cabinet emphasised the importance of communication with user groups to ensure they understood the Council's position.

At the conclusion of the discussion, the Cabinet endorsed the recommendation of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee to explore the option of a full size, temporary ice rink that met the needs of the range of ice users. Officers were asked to seek to reduce the cost of temporary provision and complete this work as quickly as possible to minimise uncertainty to ice users.

Resolved –

- (a) That the recommendation of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee be endorsed and that Officers explore the procurement of a full sized temporary ice rink to meet the needs of all users for the duration of the refurbishment of the current ice rink.
- (b) That subject to the outcome of the exploratory work in resolution (a), the Cabinet consider a further report on the costs, risks and community benefits of the provision of a temporary ice facility and considers making any recommendations to full Council.
- (c) That Officers continue to work on a programme for the capital improvement scheme to Slough Ice Arena, closing the facility in November 2016 to enable works to commence on site.

21. Reconfiguration of the Borough's Activities Offer for People with Learning Disabilities

A report was considered on the next stage of the Learning Disabilities Change Programme that sought to support people with learning disabilities by giving people more control over their lives and to live independently as part of the community. The proposal was to support more people with less complex

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needs in community based activities; to retain and invest in the day centres at Priors and Phoenix and to close the Elliman centre.

The plans were in line with the Council's strategy to provide the services that were right for each individual and respond to the changing needs of such provision. The refurbishment of Priors and Phoenix was a capital investment of £1,100,000 and the overall reconfiguration was projected to result in a revenue saving of £350,000. It was confirmed that there would still be building based day services for those that needed them, and other users would be supported with a bespoke programme of community based activities following consultation with each individual and their families.

Commissioners sought assurance that changes to the service would work for those using them and that there was sufficient capacity in the two retained centres. It was responded that detailed work had been undertaken based on the known needs of service users and it was confirmed there would be sufficient capacity at Priors and Phoenix for those that required such services. Many people currently using Elliman already accessed community based services and the location of the centre was not ideal for supporting vulnerable adults. Officers were working with the Council's leisure team, community centres and the SPACE consortium to develop the community activities.

The Cabinet discussed a range of issues including the engagement with people and their families; the support to help service users adjust; and the timescales for implementing the change. It was recognised that there was strong attachment to the centres and managing the transition to different types or locations of services was important. Each individual's needs would be assessed, following consultation with their families, with a view to closing the Elliman centre in the new year once this process was complete. The Cabinet was assured that the process would not be rushed and proper time would be taken to provide the right service offer for each person.

Councillors Anderson and Swindlehurst asked a number of questions under Rule 30, including the rationale for choosing Elliman as the site for closure; and further detail on the refurbishment of Priors and Phoenix. Each site had been carefully assessed and the location in a residential area and ASB issues were identified as reasons for recommending the closure of Elliman. The role of scrutiny was raised and it was confirmed that the closure was discussed at the last meeting of the Health Scrutiny Panel as part of wider consideration of the Learning Disabilities Plan. The Commissioner for Health & Social Care suggested, and it was agreed, that a further report be provided to the Health Scrutiny Panel and then to Cabinet prior to any final decision to close the centre. The Cabinet then agreed the recommendations set out in the report.

Resolved –

- (a) That the Council's activities offer for people with learning disabilities be reconfigured. People with less complex needs would be supported to access community based activities. People would be able to exercise their right to choose and control which community based activities met

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their individual needs through the use of direct payments. People with more complex care needs who require specialist support would continue to be supported by the Councils day centres.

- (b) That the reconfiguration of the existing council's day centres include the retention of the Priors and Phoenix services and the closure of the Elliman centre.
- (c) That the decision of when to reconfigure the services be delegated to the Director of Adult Social Care following consultation with the Commissioner for Health and Social Care.
- (d) That a further report be provided to the Health Scrutiny Panel and then Cabinet once progress had been made in reconfiguring the services and prior to a final decision on the timing of the reconfiguration.

22. Statutory Service Plans

The Cabinet considered a report that sought endorsement for the Statutory Service Plans for food safety, health and safety and trading standards to be recommended to full Council on 26th July 2016.

The detailed plans reflected the extensive work undertaken by the teams and were consistent with the Five Year Plan. The Commissioner for Regulation & Consumer Protection drew attention to the important work being done to protect vulnerable people who were at risk of rogue traders, scams and financial fraud. The team were also focused on supporting and enabling local businesses by assisting them in meeting their legal requirements.

Commissioners discussed the increasingly commercial approach towards relevant aspects of the service such as the Primary Authority scheme; and the trends in relation to Food Hygiene Rating Scheme. The Cabinet commended the team on the important work they were undertaken on behalf on the residents and businesses of the town and agreed to recommend endorsement of the three service plans to full Council.

Recommended – That the Statutory Service Plans in relation to the Food Safety, Health & Safety and Trading Standards work undertaken by the Council be endorsed.

23. Financial Planning Update 2016-21

The Interim Assistant Director Finance & Audit introduced a report setting out the latest financial planning assumptions for future years as well as highlighting the risks associated with the 2016-17 budget proposals.

It was recognised that the Council continued to face significant financial challenges given in view of the continued major reductions in the Revenue Support Grant (RSG) and other Government funding over the period of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). The Cabinet noted the updated

planning assumptions, including an assumed rise in Council Tax of 3.75% in the next financial year, however it was confirmed that this was an assumption for budgeting purposes and decisions would be taken by Members through the normal budget setting process. There was a savings requirement of £38m over the next four years, with £12m in 2017-18. The financial plans may also need to be adjusted given the uncertain impact on the Council's financial position of the significant macro-economic turbulence arising from the EU referendum.

Commissioners discussed the potential impacts of the Brexit vote, the Bellwin scheme, the progress being taken to increase income generation and the position regarding the Council's reserves. The current General Fund reserve was £8.1m, against a minimum of £7.3m, and it was considered this was reasonable but not excessive given the financial circumstances of the Council. Speaking under Rule 30, Councillor Anderson asked about the current revenue position for the first quarter of 2016-17 and whether any departments were overspending. The Officer agreed to circulate a briefing paper to all Members to update them on the in year position. Councillor Swindlehurst queried the level of directorate pressures coming through and asked about the steps being taken to contain overspend. It was responded that the MTFs included an assumption that directorate pressures would be contained at £2m each year which simply provided some tolerance in the model for planning purposes.

The Cabinet also considered the Government's new financial offer to local authorities in the form of a four year minimum RSG settlement. A decision on whether to accept the offer set out in paragraph 5.5 of the report needed to be taken by October, and it was recommended that in view of the Chancellor's decision to relax the requirement for a budget surplus by 2020 that the final decision be delegated and taken following a further report to Cabinet in September.

Resolved –

- (a) That the latest financial planning assumptions contained within the Medium Term Financial Strategy be noted.
- (b) That the creation of an efficiency statement be noted, with final sign off to approve delegated to the Section 151 Officer following consultation with the Commissioner for Finance & Strategy before the 14th October following a further cabinet update.

24. Risk Based Verification Framework

A report was considered that sought approval for the introduction of a Risk Based Verification Policy (RBV) for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support benefit claims. The Policy, at Appendix A to the report in Part II of the agenda, was considered without disclosing any exempt information.

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The policy would help people to access the appropriate benefits and process claims more quickly by applying different levels of evidence verification to claims according to the potential risk associated with those claims. It was voluntary and would streamline the process for lower risk claims allowing resources to be more targeted on processing more complex cases. Arvato had been engaged and they were on board with the new approach.

Members discussed how the policy could assist in tackling benefit fraud and asked about the number of claimants likely to use the new system. As the scheme was entirely voluntary the number who would chose to use it was unknown. Claimants would need to provide their national insurance number and it was expected that the risk of fraud could be reduced overall by implementing the policy. At the conclusion of the discussion the Cabinet agreed to adopt the use of Risk Based Verification Policy with effect from 1st October 2016.

Resolved –

- (a) That the use of a Risk Based Verification Policy for benefit claims and the policy at Appendix 1 be noted and agreed.
- (b) That it be agreed that if all new claims will be assessed using Risk Based Verification with effect from 1 October 2016.

25. Proposed Amendments to Home to School Transport Policy

A report was considered seeking approval for proposed changes to the Home to School Transport Policy. The policy had not been updated for some time and the changes aimed to promote independent travel; provide for annual reviews; increase the mileage allowance for parents and carers to 45 pence per mile; clarify provision for those aged 16-25; and remove the discretionary element for transport in future cases.

The rationale for the proposals was discussed and it was noted that the changes would promote the strategic objectives of independent travel and help to contain some of the rising costs of home to school transport. Increasing the mileage rate would incentivise parents and carers to transport children to school and improve the experience for children currently using minibus provision.

Speaking under Rule 30, Councillor Brooker welcomed the measures to promote independent travel but asked the Cabinet to rethink the proposal to withdraw the discretionary element of transport for qualifying children below statutory school age on the basis that early help for children for children with special educational needs led to better outcomes. It was responded the proposal related solely to the transport provided for future cases and would not impact on any child currently in receipt of such assistance. There was no statutory requirement to provide transport for children below school age and a consultation had been carried out. Savings made from the withdrawal of the discretionary element would help to offset the rising costs of transport for

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children of statutory school age. The Cabinet carefully considered the points raised before decided to agree to the recommendation to remove the discretionary element. If particular concerns arose following implementation than the policy could be reviewed.

Councillor Anderson raised several issues including whether the Council's Environmental Quality Team had been consulted in relation to the potential for the changes to increase car use. In response, it was stated that such consultation had not taken place but that they would be engaged to ensure consistency with the Council's wider strategic approach to green travel. It was also highlighted that it was likely that any increase in car use would be offset by a reduction in the use of taxis so the net impact was considered to be minimal.

At the conclusion of the discussion, the Cabinet agreed the proposed changes to the Home to Schools Transport policy and that the impacts would be kept under review to ensure it met the strategic objectives set out.

Resolved –

- (a) That the mileage allowance be increased from 15p per mile to 45p per mile payable to parents who are able to transport their children to school when their child meets the eligibility criteria for home to school transport. This would bring the mileage allowance into line with the local authority rate and be reviewed annually. This would be introduced with effect from 1 September 2016.
- (b) That the discretionary element of the home to school transport policy be removed, which provides transport for children under statutory school age who are in receipt of a statement for Special Educational Needs or an Education, Health and Care Plan or undergoing an assessment of their educational needs where they meet the criteria for transport. Given the notice period required to publicise this change the implementation date for this change would be 1 September 2017.
- (c) That the emphasis to promote independent travel for children and young people wherever possible be endorsed.

26. Contracts in Excess of £250,000 in 2016/17

A report was considered that sought the Cabinet's endorsement to commence tendering for two contracts in excess of £250,000 to be let during the 2016/17 financial year. The contracts were additional to those already endorsed by Cabinet in April 2016.

The first contract was to deliver local based youth provision to support positive activities and early help for 11-19 year olds. This followed a review of existing contracts and would run from January 2017 to March 2019 with a total contract value of £281,250. The second contract was an integrated cardiac prevention programme to increase the offer and uptake of Health Checks and

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reduce the risk factors for cardiovascular disease in at least 800 people per annum. The contract had an estimated value of £150,000 per annum for three years with an option to extend for a further year. After due consideration, the Cabinet endorsed the commencement of tendering for the two contracts.

Resolved – That the intention to commence tendering for the following contracts be endorsed:

1. Locality Based Youth Support.
2. Integrated Cardiac Prevention Programme.

27. References from Overview & Scrutiny

The recommendations in relation to a temporary ice facility were considered during item 3 of the agenda [Minute 20 refers].

There were no further references from the Overview & Scrutiny Committee or Panels.

28. Notification of Forthcoming Decisions

Resolved – That the published Notification of Decisions for the period between July to September 2016 be endorsed.

29. Exclusion of Press and Public

Resolved – That the press and public be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of the item in Part II of the agenda as it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information relating to an action taken or to be taken in connection with the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime and the disclosure would not be in the public interest as defined in Paragraph 7a of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (amended).

30. Risk Based Verification Framework - Appendix A

The Housing Benefits Risk Based Verification Policy was approved as part of matters resolved during Part I of the meeting without disclosing an exempt information.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.39 pm)